

Actively Engaging Students in Remote, Hybrid, and Face-to-Face Modalities

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Abstract: Actively Engaging Students in Remote, Hybrid, and On-Ground Modalities In this interactive presentation, we will discuss how to actively involve students regardless of modality and delivery. We will discuss the importance of creating daily announcements, weekly videos, and posting daily in discussion forums. We will discuss substantive posting and how to facilitate and lead discussion forums that include the ABC's of Effective Posting and Discussion Forums. A) Actively involve every student B) Build on the previous learning of each student C) Engender creative thinking and other levels of vertical and horizontal thinking. At the end of this presentation, attendees will be able to: 1. Create more substantive posts in discussion forums in all modalities of teaching and learning. 2. Create differentiated posts and creative videos to meet students on their current level of learning. 3. Engage students with creative posts, videos, and other methods accessible to students. Byron Phillips, Assistant Professor, Business and Management, Eastern Gateway Community College Johnna Provenzano, Assistant Professor, Business and Management, Eastern Gateway Community College

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Introduction

We can engage students in every modality. Modalities and deliveries include:

- Remote
- Hybrid
- Face-to-Face
- Zoom
- Blended

Online and remote learning was palpable long before the covid disaster forced quantum leaps in the transition from face-to-face to online learning environments. The ubiquitous nature of remote learning was accelerated by the pandemic, but was occurring regardless. The pandemic simply placed online learning in much bolder relief. Effective instructors can engage students in every teaching and learning modality. Every day—often in social situations—I am asked how can we have fruitful discussions in an online classroom in the manner that we do in traditional face-to-face modalities. My answer is that it is possible to have even more robust and open discussions in the online, asynchronous world. In the online asynchronous world, students have time to ponder their response without dealing with potential bias of classmates. Online discussions remove the “cloak-of-invisibility” that many non-volunteers exhibit in bricks and mortar classes. Dynamic, charismatic, and often good-looking students cannot intimidate other students with quick responses to instructor-initiated questions. In many ways—the online, asynchronous climate provides a much more egalitarian and democratic process of student involvement in discussions. The great Benjamin Bloom indicated that Bloom, Benjamin S. (March 1968). "Learning for Mastery" (PDF). *UCLA - CSEIP - Evaluation Comment*. Vol. 1.

The online, asynchronous environment never sleeps. Therefore, the online student can work as often as desired, and can complete discussions when he or she is in the best, peak performance time for their own learning preferences and natural body clock. Slower students are not embarrassed as they are in face-to-face, synchronous classroom climates in which energetic, “fast” students sitting in the first two rows often want to dominate the discussion.

No instructor or academic administrator would argue with the importance of actively involving students regardless of modality and delivery of learning and teaching. Lao Tzu, the great Chinese philosopher—who predated Confucius—influenced my thinking when he said, (Tsu, 1891)The writer’s thinking evolved and revised Lao Tse’s quotation to, “To save my students, I need to serve my students.” This commitment to serving students translates to my availability 24/7 to my students via email, text, or phone in almost “real-time.” We can engage students in every modality. “To lead, we must follow” is a constant reminder that the writer does not always have to be the “sage-on-the-stage”, “the-guide-on-the-side”, or even the “whack-in-the-back.” Rather, the instructor must be flexible and agile and meet every student where he or she is, every minute. Meeting students where we think they are, or wish they are, or where the lesson plan and curriculum indicate that they are, is never appropriate.

In designing any lesson, the writer follows a model developed many decades ago in a treatise he wrote titled, “A Guide to Master Teaching.” (Phillips B. , 1981) The dimensions in the model include:

1. Planning
2. Setting the stage for learning
3. Managing
4. Modeling
5. Motivating
6. Direct and indirect instruction

7. Questioning strategies
8. Checking for learning—Bloom—KC and a Silly Elephant
9. Practice
10. Closure

This model has been implemented in school districts and institutions of higher learning throughout the country and transcends any grade level, subject area, college, university, post-university, or work environment. Instructors have implemented this model from kindergarten through post-doctoral teaching situations.

Face-to-face is traditional, and in many ways, things are more observable in this modality. Most professionals begin and plan with a face-to-face paradigm, then attempt to build an online class. After years of teaching in all five modalities—the writer’s mental model has slowly evolved and shifted to one in which the writer plans the online dimension of every class, and then builds the face-to-face syllabus and activities. Over time—every class embodies the components of an online class. Professionals who lack the experience of online teaching have fear and trepidation with remote teaching and learning. We can avoid much of the dystopian view of online delivery with the following tips.

1. The environment should mirror the regular classroom as much as possible—especially in zoom or synchronous settings.
2. Content must be simple and focused and often not quite as detailed as face-to-face.
3. Extreme planning is necessary as are specific expectations and guidelines for students.
4. Involve every student without destroying the passive, non-volunteer. There is a delicate balance in maintaining work/life harmony by protecting the privacy of non-volunteers.
5. Greet every student, regardless of modality. In a face-to-face delivery, the instructor should greet each student as he or she enters the room. In a synchronous, online delivery, such as Zoom, the instructor should be on the class 15 minutes before the scheduled start time, and 15 minutes after the end time for small-talk, exchanging welcoming pleasantries and encouragement, and clarifying any muddy points.
6. It is vital to begin the formal part of the class at exactly the designated time and to finish at precisely the ending time. This formal process involves setting the stage, building the barn, and getting to the content as soon as possible so we do not lose those sacred four to eight minutes at the beginning of class.

One should no longer simply rely on the traditional Four R’s. The traditional Four R’s included:

- Reading
- Writing
- Arithmetic
- Responsibility

We must follow the new Four R’s of Effective Teaching. The new Four R’s Include:

- Relationship
- Results
- Retention
- Rigor

The beginning of any instructional sequence is sacred. As the instructor greets each student as he or she walks into the room and assumes a seat, a ‘Do Now’ is written on the top right corner of the white-board or chalk-board so students know exactly what to do immediately, and begin.

The writer strongly recommends cameras be turned on in synchronous classes, but we understand privacy for those who must “blur-the-lines”, and are striving to maintain work/life balance, and must keep audio and video to a minimum.

The first four minutes of any lesson are vital and we must set-the-stage for learning. The writer termed this model, “Building-the-Barn.” That is, the effective instructor does the following within the first four minutes of any instructional sequence. Building the Barn is:

1. Build on previous learning
2. Actively involve students
3. Relate learning to life
4. Name the learning

At the beginning of the first face-to-face class session, the students complete a one-page document in which they introduce themselves. This introduction includes schools attended, interests, loves and loathes, hobbies, academic interests, what they intend to get from the class, and a discussion of short and long-term career goals and life goals. These student introductions may take the entire class session as we weave in the syllabus, class expectations, grading criteria, and the course content for the first week of class.

In the online, asynchronous class, the very first activity is each student introducing himself or herself with a 250 word discussion post. The writer places his bio first in the discussion forum to serve as a model for all students. This insures proper word length, etiquette, netiquette, and civility. If Monday is day one of the academic week, the expectation is that each student will complete the introduction by 11:59 pm on Tuesday, which is day two. Each student is expected to reply to every student bio by Thursday at 11:59 pm. Students are graded on the quality of their introductory responses and on the quality of their replies to their classmates. The writer does not require citations during week one, as this can overwhelm and destroy students with high anxiety, but beginning in week two—APA Formatting and citations for all work is expected and required. All written assignments and deliverables must be in accordance with APA Formatting and a plagiarism checker is used for every student submission. A weekly video delineating how APA will be used in all learning activities and goals is posted each week. An announcement is posted every day and slide presentations and micro-lectures are included, even

in face-to-face classes. Sagacious and plentiful use of videos in all classes is vital, regardless of delivery. Effective videos are embraced by students and should be short and student-centered. It is crucial to capture all student learning styles. The following trade secrets are effective in creating videos and recorded micro-lectures:

Prework:

- Be thoughtful and intentional in dress and student involvement

The work:

- Planning and set-up
- Clear script expression
- Thoughtful of background and studio

Shooting:

- Use a tripod
- Exhale, breathe with chest up, and space above the head
- Use a variety of clothing
- Shoot outside for variety, coloring, light, and variation of backgrounds
- Audio is crucial and can impact the visual

The centerpiece of student engagement transcends any particular modality whether it be face-to-face, remote, hybrid, blended, or Zoom. Regardless of modality, the writer delivers quality in the following ways:

1. Active involvement of self and students
2. Daily announcements
3. Weekly videos
4. Daily posting
5. High expectations and following the ABC's of Effective Teaching and Posting which are:
 - a. Acknowledging the previous comment or post
 - b. Building on the learning from the previous post
 - c. Clarifying and/or asking a critical thinking question to expand the discussion
6. Individual videos and announcements for all specialized learning and exemplars are provided, as well as examples of outstanding student work. Formal announcements are posted to include APA Formatting, Citations, References, Avoiding Plagiarism, and Phillips' Laws of Etiquette, Netiquette, and Civility. The laws are:
 - a. Be respectful to others
 - b. Follow the ABC's of Effective Posting
 - c. Never flame or attack
 - d. Use higher-order, academic language
 - e. Be aware of your e-footprint and impressions
 - f. Be patient
 - g. Be selective using emoji's, humor, and texting lingo
 - h. Recommended word length for a post is 250 words

- i. Substantive posting that stimulates creativity, horizontal, and vertical thinking
 - j. Call me 24/7 with questions and issues concerning content or process.
7. Being available to students in almost real-time via email, cell phone, or text.

In today's world, nothing matters more than the active engagement of students and taking each student from his or her present level. There are no excuses for not engaging regardless of delivery or modality.

We must emphasize listening skills and questioning skills. We must insist on creating an open climate of collaboration in which students can speak openly and respectfully. To create this climate, we teach and model Phillips' Laws of Etiquette, Netiquette, and Civility, as listed above. Applying Socratic questioning and its evolution, which is precision questioning and precision answering, is a vital aspect to the effective approach to teaching. In short, we ask questions until we receive, "I-do-not-know" responses. Then we teach and reteach the content.

We must teach patience, open-mindedness, critical thinking, and mutual respect. Especially in face-to-face classes, the Socratic method of questioning will last forever—but we prefer the lexicon of precision questioning and precision answering.

The effective instructor considers four types of questions:

1. Factual (straight-forward)
2. Convergent (yes or no questions and answers)
3. Divergent (many answers)
 - a. Ex: "If we could swap out electric batteries in e-cars rather than charging them overnight, would this make electric cars more appealing to you? Why?"
4. Evaluative
 - a. "What are the similarities and differences..."

Keys for the ultimate engagement for students, regardless of modality, include:

1. Caring. Teddy Roosevelt said, "People don't care what you do, until they know you care." Nothing replaces genuine caring. Students learn better, faster, and easier when they know that we genuinely care. Caring cannot be faked.
2. Our own active involvement in class, regardless of delivery. An instructor can preach active involvement by students, but the words are hollow unless the instructor is actively involved in the course every day.
3. Robust discussions. Buirldly, substantive discussions are possible when a minimum word count of 250 words is required and modeled by the instructor. Student interest is piqued when we practice active engagement and apply the ABC's of Substantive Involvement in all discussions.
4. High expectations for everyone. The Rosenthal Studies **cited were illuminating in showing that students perform according to the expectations of instructors. It is imperative that instructors believe

that all students can learn—even if it is at different rates. In student reviews online and internal to the school, students quite often state that their professor held high expectations, but inspired them to meet and exceed those expectation and feel enormous pride in themselves, creating a desire to learn more.

5. Love, acceptance, reinforcement, rigor, respect, and retention. A statement of inclusion should be present in every syllabus, and in every class. We must visibly assure our students that they belong with us and are treasured and valued, including all differences and similarities.
6. Keeping in our consciousness the traits, qualities, and skill-sets that employers need, expect, and demand which are:
 - a. Communication: Every study relating to student and employee success includes the importance of effective communication. Students need exit-skills when they leave the program to successfully interview for jobs, acquire jobs, and retain jobs that can lead to successful careers.
 - b. Teamwork: Nearly every position today involves team-work. The vision of a strong, independent worker is passé, and replaced by people who are viable, fully-functioning members of teams. The increase in remote work has made effective teaming more vital than ever.
 - c. Ethics: One cannot listen to a news story or read a newspaper without witnessing ethical lapses in business and society. We need to teach students the difference in right and wrong and prepare students for a work force of ethics and morality.
 - d. Electronic savvy: Every professional position today involves at least a rudimentary understanding of technology. Organizations need life-long learners who will function effectively and will contribute in a global economy.

The role of evaluation and grading is of utmost importance and can never be deemphasized. Grading and evaluation matter and count for students and should matter and count for every instructor. Although I question this age-old wisdom, in this context, this is relevant and appropriate. “What gets measured, sometimes gets done.”

There is an art to developing effective discussion questions. This thoughtful process includes creating open-ended and divergent questions that promote critical thinking. These instructor questions should tap all levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy and align with the written and tested curriculum.

Discussion posting, written responses and replies, researching, oral presenting, ethics, case studies, and team activities are vital. If these imperatives are not visible to students by grades, we lose the students who are intrinsically driven. Particularly in the classes that I have control over—40% of the grade is based on discussion responses and replies as they are the lifeblood of effective courses. Discussion forums are the lifeblood of every effective class. Benefits of effective discussion forums—regardless of delivery—include:

- Ultimate interaction
- Learning from one another

- Confidence and self-efficacy
- Processing of information is enhanced for more students
- Retrieval is improved for most students
- Application to the life of student
- Students learn effective time and event management by distinguishing important/unimportant, and urgent/non-urgent tasks

It is vital to set high expectations for student participation and active involvement in every aspect of a class regardless of modality. In a perfect world, student participation in discussions would be rewarded with a grade for responses and replies. The writer creates a video describing word length, expectations, requirements, and evaluative criteria. These instructions are communicated in a variety of ways to insure quality.

We must model the work we expect and be excited about our prompts. It is crucial that we target the head, the heart, and the gut. The effective instructor avoids factual questions for there is no “grist-for-the-mill.” The instructor can ask why a student agrees or disagrees with a previous student’s post. The instructor should avoid the cupcake response, the meatball question, and being the ‘Master of the Obvious.’ The effective instructor should be aware of questions that are too complex and work to leverage images to create critical thought and then connect the prompts to the images. The instructor should not allow google to answer a discussion question. The instructor must know his or her role, provide structure, summarize, and apply active and passive listening skills.

The effective instructor privately engages the non-engaged students, while publicly acknowledging exemplary posts. The wise instructor encourages the community of inquiry and showcases teaching presence, but does not dominate discussion. It is a next-best practice to re-engage students by asking them to explain a concept in a different way.

The instructor can offer closure and showcase presence while strengthening the community of learners. The instructor can extend learning by showcasing individual contributions. It is effective to wrap up the learning with a video.

It is of paramount importance for the instructor to be present and engaged in every classroom. A weekly video is powerful, describing the goals, objectives, and activities for the week. The effective instructor is involved in forums every day, providing active feedback in the form of coaching and mentoring. It is wise to implement an open student forum in which anything can be discussed relating to the course, career, business, and life. The writer calls his open student forum, Phillips’ Café and this is placed at the top of the discussion forum. This can promote friendship, relatability, collegiality, and esprit de corps between students.

A common complaint by instructors and students is that some students wait until day seven to complete posts.

This problem can be eradicated by implementing soft and hard deadlines and rewarding early student responses and replies with robust responses and replies by the instructor, and early grading. Students commit when the instructor commits. The more active the instructor is, the more active the students will be. If it is going to be, it is up to me.

We must make attempts for students to be involved every day in class and set the example with our own total involvement. We must remember to: “be a model, not a critic”, and “to be a light, not a judge.”

In grading students, the writer incorporates traditional written feedback, but also audio and video feedback. Reaching out privately by email and phone call to students who are not actively involved is effective. The writer invites his students to his youtube channel for business and management in which he creates course content-relevant videos every day. You can subscribe to this channel at @dr.byronc.phillipsmba4754 .

If the instructor feels bold, he or she can ask the students to evaluate and rank every discussion form question when the course is completed.

An example of an effective grading breakdown may be:

1. Discussion responses—20 points
2. Discussion replies—20 points
3. Midterm essay/exam—20 points
4. Final essay/exam—20 points
5. Final research project and presentation—20 points

The instructor must constantly engage in every modality including online, for failure to do this would be akin to teaching a face-to-face class in which the instructor wrote a discussion question on a white board, exited the room, and expected the students to answer the questions on their own, and to discuss without instructor encouragement, reinforcement, evaluation, and leadership.

The goal is a classroom of inquisitive learners, regardless of modality. We want insatiable, hungry learners and it is the objective to create an inquisitive culture and environment. We need to prepare students for NOW and in the future, and meet them on their minute-by-minute level. We have the ability to influence every student, one student at a time, and one team at a time.

The writer has taught middle school, senior high school, community college, university undergraduates, graduate students, doctoral students, and post-doctoral students. My favorite placement is community college because of my influence and the gratitude I received each day. My community college students often seek a second chance, a third chance, and even a fourth chance at higher education. This is a challenge—but more so, a wonderful opportunity.

Keys to teaching these students with active engagement are:

- Caring for each student
- Believing every student can learn
- Trusting every student and being trusted
- Practicing diversity, inclusion, and recognizing and embracing the uniqueness of every person

To create an inquisitive culture these trade secrets are vital:

1. Open-ended questions
 - a. Ex. “Help me understand...”
 - b. Ex. “Have you considered...?”
2. Embrace silence (respond, but do not react)
3. Ask a stream of questions

Effective listening is vital to the entire teaching process and combines active listening (close attention), plus passive listening (spaces for silence.)

We need to meet every student on his or her level and never leave one behind. We must learn as much as possible about every student to ensure effective next-step learning.

The content for the entire class should always be loaded electronically before the first formal class session, but it is advisable to make nothing visible except the material for the current week. It is not recommended that students work ahead in a course, unless the student has special accommodations.

All classes are electronic and online in many ways. The classroom is flipped in many circumstances and the students can view videos, slides, and micro-lectures before a face-to-face meeting.

These next-best practices have been gleaned from years of asking students what they love and loathe about courses:

1. We must model relevance in all we do and teach.
2. We must be available for students for issues of content and process—the inability to get a response from an instructor in real-time when a student is working with finite time availability is a top complaint.
3. Students often perceive non-graded work as “busy-work.” A discussion forum not tied to specific grading criteria will be perceived as the “busy-work” that it is.
4. \$400 textbooks cannot be assigned and not used in the course.
5. Quizzes and examinations must be content-valid, match the written curriculum, and align with the course objectives and textbooks.
6. We must prepare students for the next-step learning.

7. We must prepare students for the next course, the next degree, the next career, and life itself.

John Dewey wrote that students learn “what they do.” What students will do and learn in classes is vitally important. One of my favorite quotations, source unknown, guides every minute of every day of my teaching:

Watch my thoughts, for they become words.

Watch my words, for they become actions.

Watch my actions, for they become habits.

Watch my habits, for they become character.

Watch my character, for they can become destiny.

As stated above, employers are desperately searching for business graduates with particular skill-sets and traits.

Employers need these traits, qualities, and skill sets:

- Communication (written, spoken, and electronic)
- Teamwork
- Ethical behaviors
- Technological savvy

How should students learn to accomplish these imperatives and how should we teach?

- Real-world and organizational problems—case studies. This is valuable as students can be more able to solve real-work issues. For too long, students were bombarded with knowledge and facts and the “empty-vessel” theory in which students were poured content into, as an empty container, was prevalent for too long.
- Team activities. The writer incorporates team activities into every class. Ideally, students are assembled into groups of three or four and they work together to solve an organizational issue. The writer insists that every team member has a speaking part in a ten minute presentation that culminates the activity. Each team submits answers to questions and offers a collaborative solution to the organization study or issue.
- Oral and written assignments. The writer acknowledges that what gets graded gets done. Whether we like this or not. In face-to-face classes—oral presentations are vital since business graduates are required to be effective communicators as demanded by employers. The writer includes, in all class announcements, guides for effective oral and written presentations. These instructive resources give examples and tips for ultimate success.
- Experiences in what they need in career and in life. It is particularly important with more mature students to address real-world, real-work, and immediate issues confronted in life. This is why andragogy is superior to pedagogy when working with mature students, as may in the community college, or executive MBA programs.

Actively involving students is possible regardless of modality with the sagacious use of:

1. Our own personal and active involvement

2. Daily announcements
3. Weekly and situational videos
4. Daily posting

Substantive posting by us sets the bar high for each student to post substantively in discussion forums. To accomplish this, we must:

1. Have an expectation of students responding to discussion questions by 11:59pm on Tuesday (soft deadline)
2. Expectation of replies by students no later than Thursday at 11:59pm (soft deadline)
3. Our own daily active involvement in every discussion
4. Tying grading to discussion forums
5. Following the ABC's of Posting, which again is:
 - a. Actively engaging every student in affirming and acknowledging all comments and posts
 - b. Building on previously stated comments or posts
 - c. Clarifying and asking critical thinking and creative thinking questions

How do we create substantive posts?

- Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered in a purely factual manner or using a yes or no response. Acknowledging that students must learn to improve writing skills to be more employable, the discussion forum should be a proving ground and practice for enhanced writing skills. The instructor can set the example for everyone by responding and replying substantively to student work. This involves acknowledging the student work, building on the student's ideas in the work, and challenging all students with critical thinking and creative thinking questions which tap various levels of thinking.
- Setting high expectations and modeling more than the energy and enthusiasm expected of students. Student will not typically perform at a more robust level than the instructor in a class.
- Making posting more than 40% of the total grade. Some students are motivated intrinsically, but most students are motivated extrinsically. If we are sincere in challenging students and teaching them in a manner than prepares them for the rigors of the world, it behooves us to attach a large percentage of the grade to the active involvement of everyone in the discussion forum.
- Celebrate and reward positive behavior and posting. People often repeat behaviors that are reinforced and rewarded. A common complaint in organization life is that people are not recognized for outstanding efforts and production. Examples of employee or student recognitions are:
 - Higher grades
 - Personal recognition in a discussion forum
 - A personal email or phone call expressing gratitude for individual student contributions
 - Volunteering to write a letter of recommendation for an outstanding student when the course is over

- Enter the world of the student and make every post applicable to student life, career, and future career. The outstanding instructor connects to the lives of students. Assignments and graded work should include opportunities for students to study, research, and write about real-world and real-work problems that can make them better at their current and future jobs. Again, meeting students where they are and inspiring them to attain higher levels of performance should be every instructors goal.
- Teach for career and future job success.
- Create happy students who want to learn more. Studies show student who are happier, learn more and learn better.
- Make myself available 24/7 by phone, email, or text.

Once again, how do we engage students regardless of modality?

1. Know our students' loves and loathes
2. Robust discussions
3. High expectations
4. Love, acceptance, and reinforcement
5. Active involvement starts with us
6. Stressing communication, team-work, research, writing, discussing ethics and relevance, and appreciation for social and cultural diversity

Discussion posting, written responses and replies, researching, oral presenting, ethics, and team activities are crucial. If these imperatives are not visible to students with grades, we lose students who are extrinsically driven.

We underestimate the influence we have over others. Most important, we sometimes dismiss the ubiquitous influence we have over students. What a reward when we read our student evaluations—especially the anonymous ones on sites such as, ratemyprofessors.com.

These moments of recognition, gratitude, and adulation make everything worthwhile. The time, the effort, the emails, the voicemails, the text messages—the hundreds of hours of planning, changing, and adapting make those moments possible.

Psychological researchers taught us that we influence our students immensely. There is no “cloak-of-invisibility” for an instructor. Every video, every post, every fast or slow reply to an email, a voicemail, a text, every time we are absent from a discussion—the students are noticing and forming judgements. Yes—students observe us even when we think they are not paying attention. We must be attentive to student needs during the entire course 24/7. The perception of students is reality.

The heartbeat of education is instilling curiosity so that students continue to study the topics as they learn by doing. Learning is doing and being.

Thank you. It was such a pleasure.

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